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ABSTRACT

More than one metaphor can be used in reflecting on and guiding literacy teaching and learning in the early years. The currently popular metaphor of "scaffolding" alone cannot capture the challenge of responding to the diversity of young children's intentions in literacy activities. An additional metaphor of "weaving" may enrich the ability to make sense of and respond to, in sensible ways, the often puzzling behavior of young children. While the scaffolding metaphor refers to the interactional support that adults and more skillful peers offer learners, weaving imagery suggests how children's progress in any one activity is supported by their experiences in varied activities. To truly scaffold or assist children in weaving the literacy web, educators must appreciate the complex intellectual and social history of children's stories, designs, pictures, and letters. These works provide insight into friendships, curiosities, and significant themes. The conversations of two students in their first 4 months of school illustrate the possibilities of metaphors. (Five figures of children's drawings are included; 26 references are attached.) (SG)

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Center for the Study of Writing

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Anne Haas Dyson

July, 1990

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WEAVING POSSIBILITIES: RETHINKING METAPHORS FOR EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

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Imagine a teacher's kindergarten classroom in an ethnically and socially diverse urban school. One of her central literacy activities is storymaking—a "holistic" rather than an "isolated letter" activity. The children all have books in which they draw pictures and then dictate or write their own tales. But one of the teacher's children, Kim, has other ideas about how to fill this learning space, this curricular activity. She is in fact most interested in making isolated letters and numbers. On this day, the teacher has helped Kim make a plan for her journal: Kim is going to draw her family. Kim makes a row of faces. She begins another row with what seems to be another face and one side of the hair—but then she makes a discovery. It is, she announces, "a 9, a little 9." She then makes a string of seemingly similar shapes that are 9's, lower-case Q's or G's (see Figure 1). As she works, she talks to herself:

Kim: (writing numbers and letters) Nine, a little 9, a G, a Q, G, a D, a 9.

Her friend Katie, sitting beside her, is intrigued:

Katie: A *D-a-9*! That's not a *D-a-9*. What does a *D-a-9* mean?

Kim: Q, a 9.

Katie: *Q-a-9*. Is that a *Q-a-9*?

. . . [omitted data]

I'm gonna make a *Q-a-9*. (Katie makes a figure that could be a lower-case Q or a 9.)

Kim's behavior posed a dilemma, one I often see in varied forms in young children's classrooms: how should teachers respond when children seem to have very different intentions than their own? Should teachers "scaffold" or guide children's behavior so that it more closely approximates expected behavior? Should they allow children to follow their own inclinations? This is not so straightforward a dilemma, for it involves making decisions about what is "meaningful" or "sensible" child behavior in a given activity and about what is "helpful" teacher behavior as well.

In this article I consider the metaphors we use to reflect on and guide literacy teaching and learning in the early years. I first offer a critical examination of a currently very popular metaphor, that of "scaffolding." I argue that this concept alone cannot capture the challenge of responding to the diversity of young children's intentions in literacy activities. I then suggest an additional metaphor, that of "weaving," one that may complicate but also enrich our ability to make sense of, and respond in sensible ways to, the often puzzling behavior of young children. To clarify both the limits of scaffolding and the complementary possibilities of weaving, I offer a closer look at the classroom experiences of Kimberly and one of her peers, Nate, in the opening four months of school.

Figure 1. Kim's faces and letters.

Scaffolding and the Challenge of Diversity

"Scaffolding" is a metaphor first used by Bruner (1975) and his colleagues and one shaped by the theoretical ideas of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978). It refers to the interactional support that adults and more skillful peers offer learners. This support allows children to engage in culturally valued activities in a more sophisticated way than they could on their own; for example, during the daily journal time in Kim's classroom, adults' guiding comments and questions helped children plan, extend, and encode or record their stories (for a discussion of instructional scaffolding and its theoretical roots, see Cazden, 1988).

In order to successfully guide or scaffold young children's efforts, adults and children must share "intersubjectivity." That is, they must share a common purpose, and they must be aware that they do so, or, to put it more simply, they must know what each other is trying to do (Rogoff, 1990). For example, Ninio and Bruner (1978) describe how a mother and her infant jointly participated in reading a book. The mother scaffolded or eased her infant into the book-reading experience by responding in a guiding way to his verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Sowers (1985) describes how teachers and children jointly discussed the children's written texts during writing conferences. The teachers responded to and helped structure children's reflections on their writing in ways that foreshadowed children's independent evaluations of their own work and that of their peers.

And yet, as in the opening anecdote, when teachers attempt to guide children's efforts, tensions may surface—differences in teachers' and children's intentions and in their ways of fulfilling intentions (Cazden, 1988; Searle, 1985). These differences may have varied sources. First, for reasons both sociocultural (Heath, 1983; Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984) and personal (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klausner, 1985), children bring to school varied social understandings and personal connections to print. Thus, teachers who work in socioculturally diverse classrooms, like Kim's and Nate's, may find themselves more easily in tune with, able to make sense of, the behaviors of children whose literacy backgrounds are most like their own.

Second, some of the differences may exist because of another kind of cultural difference, that which exists between the social worlds of adults and that of young children. Adults and children do not always agree on what is indeed socially "meaningful." And too, young school-age children may be more attuned to what is meaningful to their peers than to what pleases their teacher, as illustrated by Kim's rows of "Q-a-9's" and Katie's great interest; this peer orientation has been documented most extensively among minority children (Gilbert & Gay, 1985; Gillmore, 1983; Labov, 1982; Philips, 1972; Tharp et al., 1984).

Finally, some of the tension may arise for developmental reasons. That is, it may occur simply because young children are indeed young children who are just beginning to master a very complex activity. As beginners, children are not consistent in how they read or write. They explore the functions, processes, and forms of the written system in many different ways and thereby gain literacy knowledge and skill. For example, exploratory play with letters, "stories" composed of cursive-like script, lines and lines of favorite letters and words, as well as simple but conventional sentences like "I love you," all may be exhibited by any one child (Clay, 1979; Dyson, 1983; Sulzby, 1985). Children first struggle to orchestrate the whole system—to precisely match particular graphics to particular meanings—in familiar and meaningful situations, such as writing (and reading) their own and others' names or words and phrases from well-known signs, labels and books (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klausner, 1985; Clay, 1975; Dyson, 1987).

These differences in intentions and in ways of fulfilling intentions—differences that exist among children, between teacher and children, and within any one child—make the scaffolding metaphor problematic if it is our only way of thinking about teaching and learning. To understand and indeed make use of these differences, we must have other metaphors for reflecting on the challenges of literacy teaching and learning.

From Scaffolds to Looms

One such metaphor is that of weaving. While scaffolding is a vertical metaphor, one that represents how more skillful others support children's progress within one activity, weaving has a horizontal dimension. It suggests how children's progress in any one activity is supported by their experiences in varied activities. As I intend to illustrate, in the weaving metaphor, diversity in intentions and in ways of fulfilling those intentions is not necessarily a problem; it can in fact be considered a resource for both teacher and child.

To begin to build a rationale for such a metaphor, I offer Figure 2 as a graphic display of its dimensions. Imagine that the boxes in the Figure are all official learning spaces designed by a teacher for her children; that is, they are all curricular activities guided by particular intentions and involving certain kinds of materials and of interactions among teacher and children. To make the visual metaphor more vivid, imagine that these are learning spaces in Kimberly's classroom.

The bold box is the journal activity, in which young children are to draw pictures and dictate or write stories. As Kimberly's teacher has envisioned it, the purpose of this activity is to help children who are least experienced with written language realize that "these little marks on the paper have to do with the things that come out of their mouths"—that is, to learn something about how written language works. Too, she hopes that the activity will allow all her children an opportunity to express themselves and develop their imaginations through written language. By doing the activity daily, she intends to help them become increasingly comfortable with, and skillful at accomplishing, this activity.

The scaffolding metaphor focuses our attention on her collaboration with Kimberly in this space, on how sensitively she guides her to a more skillful performance. But, as already suggested, Kimberly is not so easy to guide. Her behavior is a puzzle, and Kimberly's teacher is unsure what to do. To make sense of Kimberly's behavior and to inform her own decision-making, she finds herself wanting to know more about Kimberly. Kimberly is clearly not trying to compose a story in this "story composing" activity. What is she trying to do? Are there occasions during the school day when other children write like Kimberly does? Are there other activities in which Kimberly does compose a message, for example, when she writes notes? Are there other kinds of activities in which Kimberly does tell or dramatize stories? If so, is there a way to begin to weave her playing with print into the storytelling or dramatic play activities? To weave her storymaking into a composing activity, for example, by encouraging her to dictate about her dramatic play (Paley, 1981)?

Thus, Kimberly's teacher begins to look beyond the activity box and to envision Kimberly's literacy learning as supported, not only by interactional scaffolds within the journal activity (a vertical view), but by a sturdy, broad loom constructed from varied activities that allow for different kinds of intentions, of interactions, and of products (a horizontal view). She wonders how she might both further these diverse intentions and begin to build from them, helping Kimberly weave new literacy possibilities from these varied experiences.

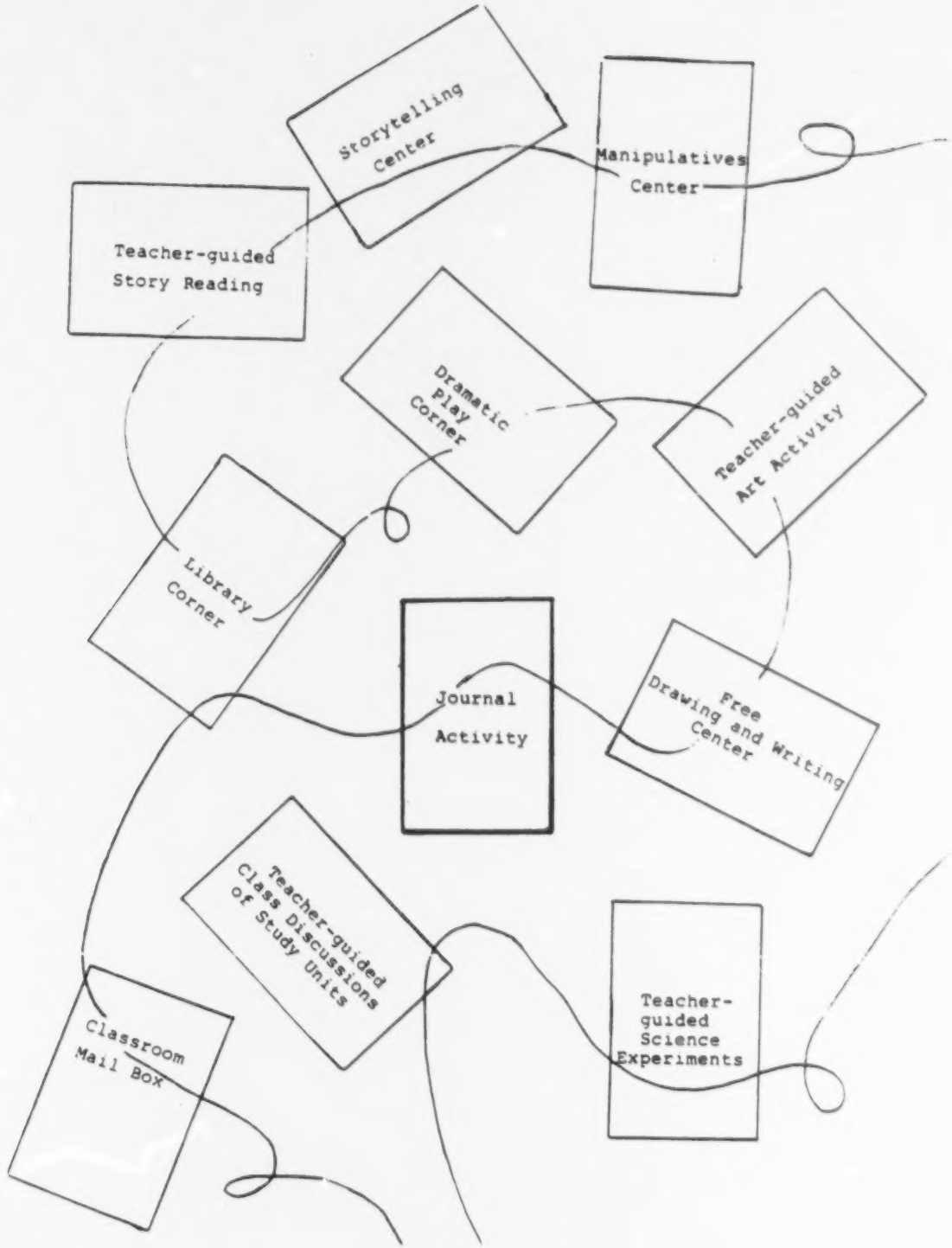

Figure 2. A classroom's learning spaces.

Broadening our vision of literacy teaching and learning in such a way may allow new insight into the complex reasons underlying children's differential progress in learning to read and write in our schools, and it may also allow new insight into ways of helping. Indeed, it was my own observations in Kimberly's classroom that changed my directional orientation. To further clarify both the limits of scaffolding and the possibilities of weaving, I turn in the next section to those observations.

A Classroom Filled with Diversity

I spent four and a half years observing and studying Kimberly's urban magnet school, a school that was indeed socially and culturally varied. During these years, I focused on the children's behavior during the daily journal activity. I was interested in how children used talking, drawing, and writing in this activity space to compose stories and in how their ways of composing stories changed over time (for the methodological details of this project, see Dyson, 1989). I also talked frequently with the children's experienced and skilled teacher, and we often discussed the children who were most puzzling to us. Gradually, through this observing and reflecting, I came to see that, to understand the puzzles, the journal activity "box" needed to be viewed within a larger frame.

To illustrate, in the following sections I present brief case histories of two children's participation in the journal activity during the opening four months of school. Nate, who was Anglo, and Kim, who was African American, were from very different social and cultural backgrounds. Like all children, they are complex and unique individuals whose experiences cannot be generalized in any simplistic way. But the details of their histories illustrate differences in intentions and in ways of fulfilling intentions that can exist between teacher and child, among children themselves, and even within the behavior of any one child. Moreover, they illustrate that some of this diversity has sociocultural roots, thus highlighting that it is our socially and culturally diverse classrooms that present the most critical need for rethinking our metaphors for teaching and learning.

The case of Nate

Nate's way of participating in the journal activity changed dramatically over the first four months of school. His tremendous progress in the journal activity did not happen only because his teacher showed interest in and in varying ways supported, "scaffolded," his efforts. As I will illustrate, Nate's success occurred in part because he was able gradually to bring into and orchestrate—or weave together—within this one school space, knowledge and skill developed through many kinds of more familiar, more comfortable activities that were guided by diverse intentions: exploring print, naming his world, telling stories, playing with friends—and, of course, all these activities were enriched in turn by the journal activity.

In the beginning of the year, Nate was uncomfortable in the journal learning space, and his intentions differed from those of his teacher. Like many of his peers, he struggled with circles and lines, trying to draw something—anything! Thus, he was most concerned with drawing a recognizable object, rather than telling a pleasing story. He dictated entries about his drawn circles and lines, as in "Mostly these are straight lines with little triangles and it's a design" or "Here are circles and lines and lots of atoms." (See Figure 3.)

Further, Nate and his peers were interested in exploring and displaying their knowledge about letters and special names. They wrote these amidst their drawings, although the written graphics typically had no relationship to the drawn ones. In the following example, Nate and his peer Rena find social meaning in the letters F and B:

Figure 3. Nate's circles, lines, and atoms.

Nate: I'll show you how Cherika writes her F.

Rena: Yeah, that's how she writes her F. And this is how she writes her B.

Despite these differing intentions, Nate gradually began to bring his experiences with print into the journal activity and thus to collaborate in more satisfying ways with his teacher. He was able to do this, at least in part, because he had certain ways of exploring print that were compatible with those of his teacher, that is, that allowed them "intersubjectivity."

For example, Nate verbally explored the letters and words his teacher wrote. He knew all about the letter K and remarked when he saw it, "My sister's name begins with a K. Wanta know what it is? My sister's name is Kimmy"; and E was an old acquaintance too: "E's in my name. Nate. Or Nathan. Nathan doesn't have an E in it." On another day he remarked about the entry *This is a design*: "This [pointing to the word *this*] is the same thing right here [pointing to the word *is*], right? If you take away these two letters [*th*] it would say the same right here [*is*], right?" Nate then, seemed to have personal connections with, and experience talking about, special words and their letters. He wove these ways of talking with adults about print into the journal-time space in school. And thus the space began to become a more comfortable one for both Nate and for his teacher.

After a month of school—and of struggling with circles and lines, Nate began to draw recognizable objects (flowers, people, animals), and his teacher encouraged him to think about his pictures in planning his stories. And, indeed, Nate began to dictate extended texts. Nate did not, in one month, acquire "story knowledge," but rather, because he could now draw recognizable objects, he more readily adopted his teacher's intention. He thus began to weave into this activity the storytelling knowledge he had developed through other activities. And, because his way of telling stories was compatible with that of his teacher, the space became still richer for them both. Consider this excerpt from Nate's "dinosaur season" story, a story that greatly entertained his teacher and his peers:

> This is a cat and a turtle. And a dog came along and chased the cat and a monster came along and chased the turtle and ate the turtle up and a dog ate the cat up. But the dog was really a bat. And a witch came along and the monster ate the witch up. And the monster ate the bat up. And a two-headed Tyrhonosaurus Rex came along and ate the monster up. And a Triceratops came along and killed the Tyrhonosaurus Rex . . . And Ancleasaurus came along and. . . almost ate the Triceratops. And Ancleasaurus died. And Thunder Lizard came along, and he tried to kill Aleasaurus but Aleasaurus ate him. And they died and it was over, the dinosaur season.

Before another month had passed, Nate brought his friends into this learning space, and he began to weave his skill at playful interaction into the journal activity. His friends thus helped the journal activity become more playful and more socially comfortable, and they also helped him elaborate and extend his stories, just as they did during dramatic play. In the following example, Nate involves his peer Chiel in his own evolving drawn story and participates as well in Chiel's:

> Nate is sitting next to Chiel today. He has just drawn a person jumping off a diving board (see Figure 4). As he works, he calls Chiel's attention to his efforts:

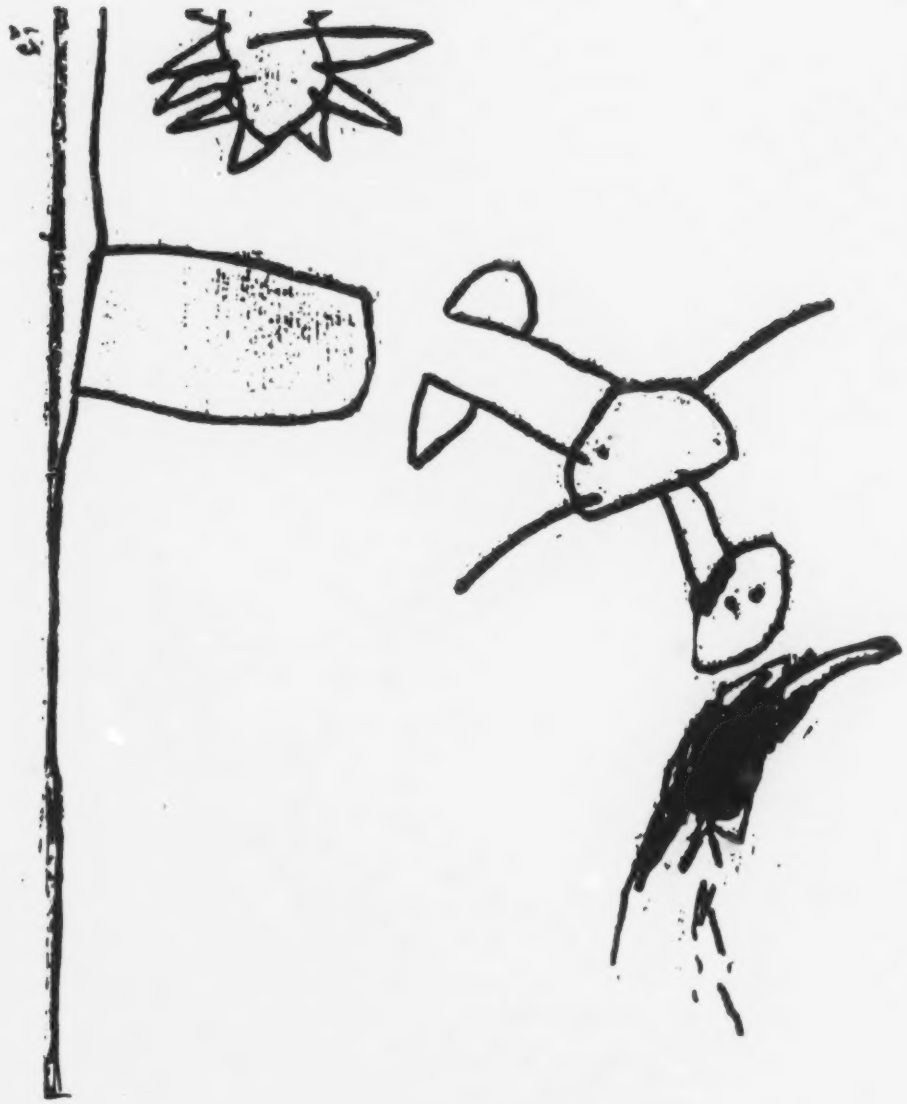

Figure 4. Nate's person diving off diving board.

Nate: Boing, boing, boing. (bouncing in his chair) . . . Chiel, I made a picture of somebody diving off the diving board. And there's no water in the swimming pool. Hah hah. Hah hah.

Chiel: Oh! I have no head. (feeling above his head and playing along with Nate's drama)

Nate: WHAT?! I have no head! HELP ME!

Chiel announces that he is drawing space [i.e., the solar system and, amidst the system, a rocket ship], and his plans seem to influence Nate.

Nate: (stops drawing) Chiel! Chiel! I know. That's what we could do. You know what?

. . .

Look! Look! The person, the person does EEEEEEWWWWWWWW. Dum dum. (dramatizing person diving up toward the sun and then heading toward water)

. . .

Look! Look! Chiel, look! AWEEE! I'm getting burned! (laughs)

Chiel: Make a sun right here [in the path of the diver]. Make a sun right there.

Nate: No. I'll make—No I'll make um um Mercury right here. (Nate adds the marks under the diver's head.)

Chiel: Mercury. Yeah! He's gonna bump into it. (laughs)

Nate's more elaborate drawn stories allowed him to easily dictate summaries of his dramatized and drawn adventures to his teacher, as in the following example:

Once upon a time there was a diving board. And a person dived off it. And there was no water. And he bumped into Mercury and broke his head. And he went through Mercury and broke his head. And he went through Mercury and he went down to here and broke his stomach.

Nate was now using the journal activity as it had been officially intended by his teacher. He was composing stories as he drew and talked, stories that were solidified in his construction of a text. By the end of the fall semester, Nate's growing sense of competence as a journal-time story creator and letter puzzler led him to use his know-how to write his own message in the story-making space. His first official, extended independent writing was relatively sophisticated, as it indicated knowledge of the alphabetic system. In the midst of a picture about a sunken ship with a locked treasure chest, Nate wrote:

FURLVDKITRH (translation: If [F] you [U] are [R] looking [L] for [V] the [D] key [K] it [IT] is right [R] here [H].)

In sum, Nate's intentions during the journal activity initially differed from those of his teacher. He was uncomfortable in the task and, in fact, in school. He explored the

medium and used it to reach out in child-like ways to his friends ("This is how Cherika writes her F.") And he worried about drawing a picture that looked like something. His brief dictated "stories" might suggest a child who did not know much about written stories and, perhaps, about the written system. However, although Nate did not seem to have much experience drawing or writing stories, he did have experiences with print, with stories, and with collaboratively creating socially meaningful, imagined worlds in play. While his teacher did not explicitly help him draw upon these experiences, Nate was able to do so in ways that made sense to the adults in his classroom (i.e., in ways that were compatible with their ways of talking about print and of telling stories).

The case of Kimberly

I initially attended to both Kim and Nate because their behavior was very similar. Like Nate's, Kim's intentions during the journal activity differed from her teacher's and were similar to those of many of her peers. However, Kim's behaviors differed in degree from Nate's, as she was less concerned than he was about the teacher's instructions to draw a "picture" and compose a "story." And some of her ways of fulfilling her intentions differed socioculturally from both Nate's and her teacher's. Thus, her case illustrates another source of diversity and, also, makes most dramatic the need for rethinking the scaffolding metaphor.

In the beginning of the year, Kim, like Nate, filled her pages with circles and lines. Those circles and lines, though, were not transformed into animals and people but into letters and numbers. She made these intriguing objects all over her papers and then in more orderly rows and columns. (See Figures 1 and 5.) Indeed, playing with these symbolic forms was one of the ways Kimberly played with her friends.

Kim, then, was more intent than Nate on exploring and becoming comfortable with the written medium itself. This interest in letter exploring made sense. At school entry, Kim had known the alphabet as a rote routine and a cheerful song. Unlike Nate, she did not spontaneously connect letters with important people or things. She was now exploring the critical features of these letters in her own ways (e.g., discovering the similarities between a "g" and a "q") and attending carefully to the special letters and words that were important to her friends.

But this sort of activity wasn't too "meaningful" in the story composing space. Her teacher, understandably, was interested in journal entries that were "something," and, by the end of the fall semester, Kimberly had abandoned her intense letter- and number-making for drawing, through which she could make "something." This was progress in that Kim was clearly concentrating on a story—and yet her exploring of letters and numbers greatly decreased.

As the school year progressed, Kim sometimes told stories cued by her drawings. Thus, like Nate, she began to adopt her teacher's intention. And, also like Nate, Kim often told exceedingly long stories, but hers were much more difficult for most adults in her classroom to make sense of and record. Kim's stories had an episodic quality; Kim linked related events but also played with the rhythm and rhyme of language in ways similar to stories told by other non-middle-class children of African American heritage (Cazden 1985; Michaels & Cook-Gumperz, 1979). Listen to Kim, Kim's friend Katie, and me, as we attempt to record a story; as will be clear, Katie does a better job than I do of listening to Kim:

Figure 5. Kim's fives.

Kim has just completed a page of varied shapes and curly lines. Since her teacher is unavailable, Kim is dictating to me.

Kim: This is when the clouds start to go away, 'cause it's cold up the sign, and the sign is wiggling so bad, 'cause it's so bad.

. . .

And I know when the—And I know when the cloud is agoing away 'cause it shoulda going away. Cause devils are in—at my house and in the cloud. Devils better get out of my cloud.

. . .

The devil going in the paint [of her house] and the devil's always gonna be—and the devil's always gonna sleep in the paint, and paint, and paint everyday, the paint. And the closet so so scary, cause there are too many—

Katie: People!

Kim: ghosts, and triangles [Kim has drawn triangles], and spiders.

Dyson: I'll tell you what. I'll just write—

Kim: Write a lot.

. . .

Write: "This is the devil. And the cloud so scary. The cloud is—"

Dyson: Wait! This—

Katie: is

Kim: Yeah.

Katie: is

Kim: is

Dyson: is

Kim & Katie: a

. . .

Dyson: This is a ?

Kim: This is a ghost. The ghost went up, and up the—

Katie: (singing loudly to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell") The ghost went up the slide. The ghost went up the slide.

Dyson: 'Kay. This ⌜is a ghost.

Kim: ⌞is a ghost. And the ghost went up the stairs. The ghost went up the only way, then went way, way, the way, way down.

Dyson: And the ⌜ghost—

Kim: ⌞the ghost, had, wings. The ghost, had a—the hops. The ghost, is, [a] wiz. The ghost, is a wuz.

Dyson: (rereading) This is a ghost. The ghost went up the stairs.

Kim: Write a lot! Write there, and write there. Write there, and write there. (Kim is pointing to varied areas of her paper. She wants me to fill the page with letters, just as she does.)

Katie: (characteristically curious about Kim's doings) Why did that go up the stairs?

But Kim does not answer, as she has begun to write letters herself. While she may be writing or extending the story she has just told, she is not interested in talking about her story—just in writing letters.

In the end, I recorded only a small portion of Kimberly's story: "This is a ghost. And the ghost went up the stairs."

Thus, Kimberly had trouble weaving her ways of exploring print and of telling stories into the journal time activity. Even when her intention seemed to match her teacher's—to construct a story—collaboration did not flow smoothly. Nonetheless, Kimberly's teacher worked very hard with Kim, scaffolding her efforts. She helped her plan a picture to draw in her journal and then talked with her about her pictures. Kim's drawings gradually became more realistic, and she dictated short descriptions of her pictures. For example, at the end of the fall semester, Kimberly dictated the following text to accompany a picture (see Figure 6):

> The boy has two rainbows. They are in his room. And his mother doesn't want to hear it. [The latter sentence was often incorporated into her earlier extended stories.]

In sum, neither Nate nor Kimberly was initially comfortable in the journal activity. But Kimberly clearly had a much more difficult time. The scaffolding metaphor directs our attention to the teacher's official intention and to how Kimberly was helped to more skillfully and conventionally carry out that intention. But, in doing so, it snips from view the dangling threads in Kimberly's behavior—the "meaningless" exploring, the "rambling" stories, the "off task behavior" with her peers. But these threads had roots in more familiar experiences. And, just as with Nate, these experiences were providing Kimberly resources from which to weave new understandings, new ways of participating in activities. That is, they were her ways of exploring print, of constructing imagined worlds, of collaborating with others. In the final section of this article, then, I briefly consider the implications of this weaving metaphor for the difficult decisions educators make daily about how best to help all their children.

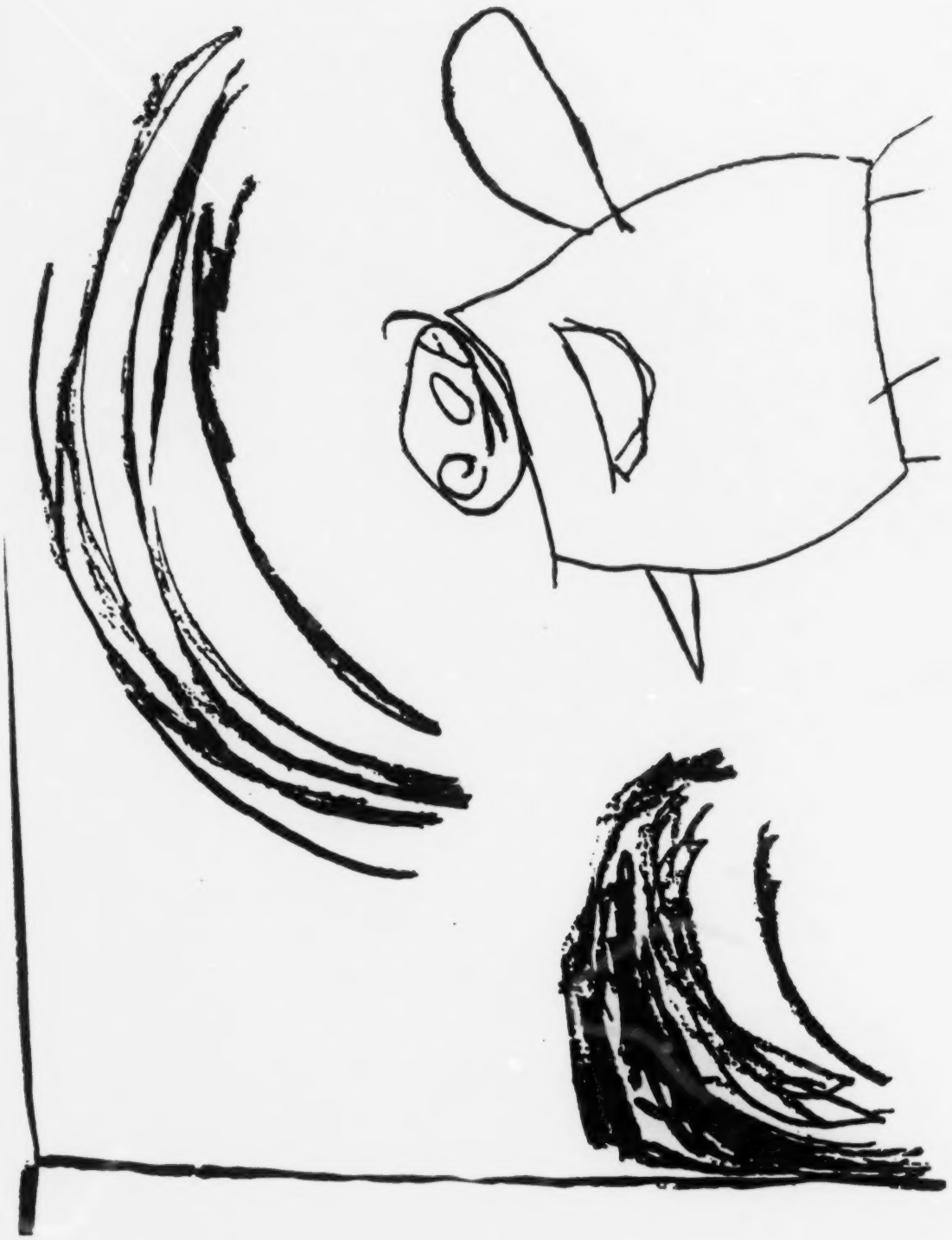

Figure 6. Kim's boy with rainbow.

Teachers and Children: Weaving the Diverse Texture of Literacy

The histories of Nate and Kim do not lead to an argument for "the best" way to do literacy activities, particularly dictating or composing, with children. There is no one best way; decisions about helping individual children must be made by individual teachers who know them well. The journal activity in their classroom was a fine one. Nate's and Kim's experiences with this activity have, however, led to this suggestion of a new metaphor for reflecting on literacy teaching and learning.

I have argued, then, that our conceptions of helping or "scaffolding" children's literacy development may be too linearly conceived. For children's progress in even our much valued "holistic" literacy activities is fed by all kinds of intention-guided experiences we may not specifically value. We must consider, not just the intentions important to us as teachers, but the intentions important to children and how we might help children build from those intentions. Thus, in addition to the scaffolding metaphor, we need a weaving one that portrays teachers as helping children weave literacy from the rich diversity of resources they bring to school with them, resources nurtured by their intentions in varied learning spaces. Too narrow conceptions of literacy programs may block from view all the kinds of experiences that feed into literacy and thus may have serious consequences for children, particularly for those most dependent upon the school for learning to read and write (Delpit, 1989).

To accommodate the rich diversity of children's ways of exploring and using written language, the classroom itself should allow diverse kinds of experiences, including space for children to follow their own agendas and for teachers to guide them toward new possibilities. But despite the importance of a range of language and literacy-rich opportunities, providing opportunities is not enough to support children's literacy development, nor is helping children within the context of each activity. For it is through weaving together experiences in and out of school that children create comfortable learning places for more skillful literacy efforts. Thus, a rich diversity of experiences—composing, dictating, exploring, labeling, storytelling and playing—enriches our own decision-making, as well as the children's literacy learning. Observing children across a range of learning spaces allows us to discover the texture of individual children's resources and to help them make connections among them.

To elaborate, the case histories illustrate that children are differentially successful in drawing upon their resources in school literacy activities. Nate, for example, responded to the open-ended journal activity with diverse intentions. However, his exploratory, playful, and storytelling behaviors enriched the texture of the activity, as they became part of the working material of both his teacher and Nate himself in collaboratively completing his journal stories.

Kimberly had more difficulty. Like many children at school entry, she had a greater desire to freely explore the written language system, confronting those puzzling q's and misleading g's and getting a sense of the visual layout of a page. Marie Clay revealed the developmental sense of this child-directed "exploring with a pencil" (Clay, 1977; also 1975). If this behavior is not appropriate in a text-composing activity, then it might be given an outlet in a free drawing and writing center.

Further, as earlier suggested, to truly "scaffold" Kimberly's text-producing behavior, her teacher might aim to draw upon resources revealed in other learning spaces. For example, through observation, she might learn of child-dramatized or told stories that suggest a peer's or an adult's story of special interest, friends whose names might go in a special book or for whom "I love you" presents might be made, "key words," like

important people's names, that might be linked to "isolated letters" (Ashton-Warner, 1963). In such ways, exploratory, socially playful, and storytelling behaviors might not only be acknowledged but also woven into literacy activities.

However, as I illustrated in my own interaction with Kimberly, teaching and responding to children takes reflective practice. For example, if children's own stories are to be a resource for literacy learning—if they are to be acknowledged, talked about, and related to other kinds of stories found in other kinds of places, like books (Heath, 1983)—then adults need to be able to hear them. Only at night, as I listened to the taped event in the quiet of my living room, did I see Kim's scariness theme, evident in the dark, cloud-filled sky, in the dark closet, and in the creatures that filled them both. That theme, evident in many children's books, might have served as a theme for reflective and integrative talk for Kimberly, Katie, and me. I was too intent on trying to write Kim's story to listen and talk about it. (Like children, adults have difficulty managing the complex literacy task as well.)

Assisting children in their weaving, and thereby building upon child resources, makes developmental sense, no matter whether one adopts a Piagetian perspective, which emphasizes children's own construction of knowledge, or a Vygotskian one, which emphasizes the importance of interaction with more skilled others (Rogoff & Gardner, 1984). All concerned with developmental teaching and learning stress that children, like adults, must build upon the behaviors they already control, the resources they have. To put it simply, nothing comes from nothing. Moreover, this metaphor makes sociocultural sense, as it encourages us as educators to work harder to understand and develop pedagogical examples of teachers building on diverse kinds of child resources, particularly the resources of children whom schools traditionally have not served well.

Perhaps most important is the message underlying or motivating the suggestion of this metaphor. It is that we as professional educators must be cautious that our own language does not constrain us. Terms like "meaningful" and "scaffolding" can become meaningless if they do not allow us to see and allow space for the diverse intentions and resources of our children. To truly scaffold, assist, children in weaving the literacy web, we must appreciate the complex intellectual and social history of their stories, designs, pictures, and even letters, however modest, for they allow us insight into friendships, curiosities, and significant themes, the stuff of which literacy is made.

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